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Bear Facts, 2013

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MAINE DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

BEAR FACTS

Black Bears Are Thriving in Maine

- Black bears are widely distributed in Maine.
- More than 30,000 bears occur statewide.
- Maine's bear population has increased 67% since 1990 in response to years of low harvest and high cub numbers.
- Maine has the largest bear population in the eastern United States and one of the largest in the continental U.S.
- IFW receives an average of 500 nuisance bear complaints each year; in 2012, 870 complaints were reported.

Maine Has a "State of the Art" Bear Management Program

- Maine has one of the most extensive, comprehensive, and longest standing bear studies in North America. It is based on wildlife management's most current, scientific methods.
- More than 3,000 bears have been captured and marked since 1975.
- Between 79 and 100 radio-collared bears are tracked annually; ~85 den sites are visited each winter.
- IFW collects detailed information on bear survival, birth rates, behavior, and animal condition.
- Information gathered from this study allows IFW to adjust the bear harvest to levels to meet bear population objectives and ensure the conservation of Maine's black bears.
- IFW has monitored bear harvests since 1969.
- As part of a periodic update to Maine's bear management plan, an integrated population model using this extensive data set is being developed.

Public Input Determines Black Bear Management Objectives

- In 1999, a public working group representing landowners, forest industry, sportsmen, environmentalists, etc., developed the following management objectives for 2000 through 2015:
    1. Stabilize the bear population through annual hunting and trapping harvests.
    2. Promote traditional hunting and trapping methods.
    3. Promote public tolerance of bears in Maine.

Regulated Hunting is the Primary Tool to Achieve Publics' Goals and Objectives

- To achieve publically derived population objectives and stabilize bear numbers, a harvest of 3,500 to 4,500 bears is need.
- Although Maine's bear harvest averaged 3,780 between 1999 and 2004, harvest has declined by 23% (averaged 2,910 bears annually) since 2005 and is attributed to a 24% decline in hunter numbers.
- Although hunting bear over bait is the most effective way to hunt bears in Maine and meet bear population objectives, other methods, including traps and hounds, are needed to reach objectives.
- Since 1999, between 368 and 623 bears were harvested each year with hounds or traps.
- Bear harvest rate by method has not changed since 1999:

Bait	79%	Incidental to deer hunting	4%
Hounds	11%	Method unreported	3%
Trapping	3%		

- Success rate of bear hunters using bait and hounds is about 30% each year and 19% using traps.
- By comparison, 79% of moose hunters, 38% of turkey hunters, and 14% of deer hunters were successful in 2012.
- Other bear hunting methods used in states that have restricted the use of bait and/or dogs may be unworkable and are likely impractical in Maine because of our terrain and thick vegetation.
- Bears can only regulate their numbers at extremely high population levels after becoming malnourished and fewer cubs are born and more cubs starved; conflicts between bears and people would also rise.

For more information, check our website: www.mefishwildlife.com **Updated May 8, 2013**